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Describing the Errors in the Translations of Iranian novice English Translators

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Abstract

Translation plays the role of information transmitter among nations. The translator should be equipped with linguistic and sociolinguistic, and other kinds of information to be able to preserve the intended meaning. This paper investigated the problematic areas in translation based on researcher's experience, as an official English translator to the Judiciary, and the analyses of the translations done by Iranian graduates and undergraduates who were seeking job as English translators. The researcher analyzed the translation products and highlighted the parts seemed problematic to him. The findings showed that the translators' had committed errors in linguistic, cultural and stylistic areas.

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1. Introduction

Translation has played a great role in the history of human social life. Nowadays its role has been emphasized by the overwhelming developments in communication technology. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive definition for translation since it has got so many sub-sections in both the theoretical and practical perspectives. Translation has been defined by different scholars Catford (1965); Nida (1954); Hozhabr Nejad (1993), Newmark (1998), and Manafi (2003), but most of them share in this fact that: Translation is an activity comprising the interpretation of the meaning of a text in one language -the source text - and the production, in another language, of a new, equivalent text - the target text, or translation. This definition mentions 'interpretation', and 'text' in the same sentence. Interpretation may be written or oral, but text limits it down just to the written form, which shows that even in the

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definition statement contradictory elements may arise! Translation was traditionally done by human translators, but recently machine translation has also got its popularity. Translation has its share in most of our communicative activities, from political, to social to economic events.

Carrying out translation is not an easy task; it is a combination of art and skill. A successful translator should enjoy a good amount of knowledge in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and other fields which relate to our human life! This knowledge is just one aspect of the required features for such a translator, an innate capacity to work as a translator is also required. The translator should be familiar with translation theories, putting them into practice and revise the product according to his own intuition while transmitting the intended meaning without distortion. Theory and practice are interdependent. According to Larson (1991), "Good theory is based on information gained from practice. Good practice is based on carefully worked-out theory. The two are interdependent".

A faulty translation may have some undesirable results. According to Venuti (1998:1) "the scandals of translation are cultural, economic, and political." An ideal translation should be: accurate in the expression of meaning, natural according to the norms of the receptor language, and communicative in transmitting all aspects of the source text to the audience in an understandable way. This prescriptive status toward translation is a theoretical idealization and faces many hindrances in practice. Linguistic items are not fix entities, that is, there are more than one references for one word denotatively and connotatively. An ironic statement may express something which is in complete opposition to its surface structure. To sum up, a language translator may face restrictions in the process of translation which are derived from different sources. They may be linguistic, cultural, personal or contextual problems. World languages share some commonalities referred to as principles by Chomskyan linguists, while they differ in their parameters. Transferring the same concept in one language to the other one may result in some formal (linguistic) inconveniences. Any culture has got its own peculiarities, so we do not expect the same concept to have a shared value among different cultures. A specific translator may suffer some linguistic or non-linguistic knowledge deficiencies which reduce the merit of the translated work. Texts may have different interpretations in different contexts; failing to appreciate those nuances in contextual meaning may distort the translation product.

It should be stated that criticizing is much easier than producing an acceptable product, here the purpose is to aware Iranian novice translators of the common problems in the works of the participants which may be regarded as personal choices rather than errors. This researcher, as an English teacher and official translator to the Judiciary has witnessed some translations suffering from one or more problems mentioned above. So he decided to carry out a study to investigate the common problems found in the translation products of Iranian graduate or undergraduate persons seeking job as English translator for which they participated in tests consisting texts to be translated from English into Persian or vice versa. To carry out the study 100 test samples from different testing occasions, in which the researcher was the examiner, were analyzed for possible problems according to the standards available in the related literature. The significant of this study lies in its use in other translators' awareness, especially the novice ones, not to commit those errors in their translations.

2. Review of the related literature

Translation is a process which begins by decoding the meaning in the source language and re-encoding it in the target language. There are several factors which affect the process of translation through its journey from the source text to the target one. Larson (1988) has pointed to the process of translation as follows:

Translation is a process based on the theory that it is possible to abstract the meaning of a text from its forms and reproduce that meaning with the very different forms of a second language. Translation, then, consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context. (p. 3)

Larson (1998) has presented the task of translation through a schematic representation.

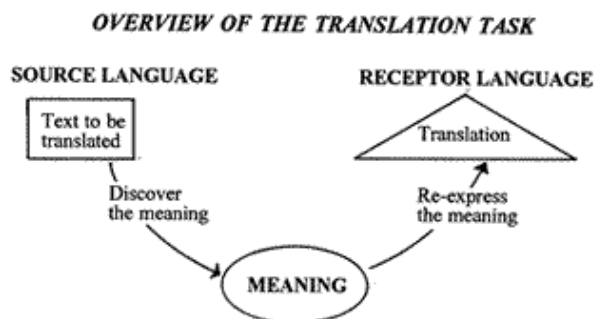


Diagram from Larson 1998, p. 4

Reviewing the related literature we come across several methods and procedures used in translation, I just mention them list wise here, and refer the interested readers to detailed sources for their explanations. Translation may be categorized into several types regarding methods of representing the source concept in the target language. These methods of translation include: word for word; literal; faithful; semantic; communicative; idiomatic, and free translation. Different procedures may be used in translation according to the possibilities available for the translator in the target language, as well as, the purpose of translation. These techniques may include: borrowing; calque; literal translation; transposition; modulation; reformulation; adaptation, and compensation.

****Types of translation according to Beekman and Callow (1989) in Manafi(2003)**

Acceptable & Unacceptable Translations	Form of the SL completely followed	Unacceptable → Highly Literal
	Form of the SL adjusted	Acceptable → Modified Literal
	Natural form of the RL employed	Acceptable → Idiomatic
	Form of the ST ignored and the content distorted	Unacceptable → Unduly Free

Catford(1965) has used extent and rank as two factors in categorizing translations.

1. Full translation: the whole text is translated

a) Extent→

2. Partial translation: Some words are not translated

Translation→

1. Word-for-word translation: SL word order is kept
- b) Rank→ 2. Literal (Restricted) Translation: It is half way W-f-W&F Trans.
3. Free (General) Translation: Meaning based Translation

Measuring the success in translation is not an easy task and many scholars, namely Larson (1991); Venuti (1995); Manafi Anari (2003); Mahmoodzadeh (2005), and Khomeijani Farahani (2005); have provided the field with some criteria. These standards include: faithfulness, that is, loyalty to the source text and author in concept and style representation; transparency, that is, clarity and intelligibility in translation, and accuracy, which means selecting the closest equivalence for the source concept based on the contextual clues. When evaluating a piece of translation work the evaluator should bear in mind that one of the sources of low quality may be the source text itself, that is, if the source text has suffered a weak style and diction it is not the fault of the translator that the target text is not a master piece! Khomeijani Farahani (2005) has introduced five criteria of accuracy, formal loyalty, naturalness, consistency, and unity for translation evaluation, and has called them “translation evaluation criteria”. Evaluation of translation is not an easy task since there are different views regarding the procedures and processes in translation. Scholars do not agree on fixed principles to be considered as standards in translation evaluation and the evaluators and translator trainees should be satisfied with relatively prevalent rules. Gutt (1990) stated that:

I distinguish direct from indirect translation. Direct translation corresponds to the idea that translation should convey the same meaning as the original. It requires the receptors to familiarise themselves with the context envisaged for the original text. The idea that the meaning of the original can be communicated to any receptor audience, no matter how different their background, is shown to be a misconception based on mistaken assumptions about communication. Indirect translation involves looser degrees of resemblance. I show that direct translation is merely a special case of interpretive use, whereas indirect translation is the general case. In all cases the success of the translation depends on how well it meets the basic criterion for all human communication, which is consistency with the principle of relevance. Thus the different varieties of translation can be accounted for without recourse to typologies of texts, translations, functions or the like.

Translators should enjoy good command in both source and target languages. They should be trained in translation classes regarding the peculiarities of different languages. According to Rahimi (2003) the translation trainees should become aware of: a) form, b) meaning, c) register, d) sources of language influence, e) style and clarity and f) idioms. Translators' unfamiliarity with translation theoretical principles and practical techniques may result in some error in the translation product.

According to Farahzad (2003) two types of difficulty in translation are (1) comprehension of the source text (ST), and (2) its translation. Both of them have three levels of lexical, syntactic, and conceptual difficulties. Lexical difficulty refers to the readability and meaning of lexical items- one-to-many and many-to-many correspondences; lexical mismatching; culture-bound words and words signifying non-universal concepts; adverbs ending in -ly into adverbial phrases; prepositions demanding more than literal translation; and lack of equivalent terms in the case of technical terminology. Syntactic difficulty includes unusual grammatical arrangements and sentences containing elements difficult to transfer to the target language, items such as tense, and voice. Some concepts are not translatable in the target situation because of cultural or other factors. Catford (1965) has categorized untranslatability as cultural and linguistic, where difficulty is linguistic, and where it is cultural. An additional type of problem in translation does not relate to the linguistic or cultural nature of the material to be translated but to the field of translation, that is, the subject matter of translation such as literature, medicine, politics, etc which have their own register and style of expression.

3. Data analyses and results

To find the common types of errors Iranian translators commit in translating English texts into Persian and vice versa, 100 samples translated by Iranian graduates and undergraduates seeking job as English-Persian

translators were analyzed. The researcher planned to use a descriptive method in his analysis and not to limit it by prescriptive frameworks. That is, he decided to carry out the research in a bottom up mode not dictating a top down procedure to the text analysis. After a detail analysis of the texts it was revealed that the majority of problems were based on linguistic and cultural differences between English and Persian from one hand and genre differences among different fields of translation in the other hand.

- General problems

It seems that the majority of these participants lacked the first feature required for a good translator, the mastery of both source and target languages. They had problems in both Persian and English structures, vocabulary, and punctuations. In addition it seemed they oversimplified the translation of some common words and did not take enough time to check their appropriateness in the required context. In addition they did not have enough background information even in those fields they had claimed to be skilful in!

A. Linguistic problems

1. Lexical (English into Persian)

- The main meaning was used regardless of the nuances in meaning according to the context; it includes differences both in concept and level (content and formality);
- There were problems when there were words having one or multiple meaning in English but multiple or one in Persian respectively;
- Expressions and idioms caused Iranian translators commit errors;
- General terms into specific ones, and vice versa;

(Persian into English):

- Improper words because of using Persian-English dictionaries without paying attention to context;
- Unexplained transliterations or long paraphrases, because of not finding the proper equivalents for Persian words in English;
- Strange (translator coined) translations for word, idioms and expressions;
- General terms into specific ones, and vice versa;

2. Structural (English into Persian)

- To many passive sentences;
- Long sentences (not breaking too long sentences into shorter ones);
- Improper structuring (not considering the level of formality or context);
- Misrecognition of different parts of speech (e.g. gerund used as noun considered as verb, or adjective ending in -ly considered as adverb);
- Verb tense and person problems (improper tense transfer and singular/plural mismatch);

(Persian into English)

- Unnatural structures (structures influenced by Persian structure);
- Improper use or non-use of prepositions (using prepositions which are not collocated with the used verbs, using preposition when they should not have been used, and not using prepositions where they should have been used);
- Improper use of articles a, an, and the (too much or too less or used improperly);

- d. Improper collocations or structures (bringing two adjectives having the same or similar meanings e.g. beautiful and pretty)

B. Cultural

English into Persian

- a. Domestication or familiarization of foreign concepts instead of translating them along with explanations (electoral board into shoorae negahban);
- b. Omission of culture bound linguistic element;
- c. changing the affective side of the meaning of some elements (some words carrying a negative connotation toward Iranian government but the translators used equivalents with positive or neutral connotations);
- d. Translating Christian religious terms into Islamic ones without considering the inherent differences;
- e. Using literal translation for symbols or proverbs resulting in unnatural and sometimes strange translation.

Persian into English

- a. Transliterating terms specific to Iranian or Islamic tradition without explanation;
- b. Translating terms specific to Iranian or Islamic tradition without paying attention to the cultural differences;
- c. Translating Islamic religious terms into Christian ones without considering the inherent differences;
- d. Translating terms having cultural connotations (social, political, ...) without explanation;
- e. Using literal translation for symbols or proverbs resulting in unnatural and sometimes strange translation.

C. Stylistic

English into Persian

- a. Most of the translators did not pay attention to the specific atmosphere of the text and they translated it according to their own taste (formal or informal translation);
- b. Almost all of them inclined to represent a literary translation of the text (formal or informal but with literary effect);

Persian into English

Most of them preferred to translate Persian texts into formal English (both in lexicon and structures). It seemed that they were not aware of stylistic differences or they had a kind of inclination to write in a fixed manner using formal vocabulary and structures.

4. Conclusion

The results based on the analyses of 100 sample translations carried out by Iranian graduates and undergraduates seeking job as English-Persian translators revealed that the problems common in their translation could be summed up in three areas of Linguistic, cultural and stylistic difficulties. Linguistic difficulties consisted of lexical and structural features which reduced the level of product acceptability. Cultural difficulties included terms or expressions loaded with religious, social, political or similar connotations. Most Iranian participants in this research preferred a personal fixed style without considering the atmosphere of the text. Since this study has not included the

works of famous Iranian translators in its analyses, its findings should be interpreted cautiously. Since the majority of the participants of this had similar problems, it would be useful to carry out a research using interviews or questionnaires to find the sources of these problems.

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